Reintegration of Child Soldiers: Psychosocial and Legal Issues

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Objectives

- Define “child soldier”
- Cite protective documents for children
- Understand scope of the problem
- Describe recruitment & retention techniques
- Discuss important developmental issues
- Describe best practices for recovery

Child Soldiers: A Definition

"All people under the age of 18 who directly or indirectly participate in a military or political armed conflict. Also included as child soldiers are persons under the age of 18 who are recruited into a country's armed forces or to a non-government military organization, even if the country in question is in a state of peace."

(Save the Children, 1999)

Documents Pertaining to the Prohibition of Child Soldiers

- United Nations Security Council Resolution 1261 (1999)
- Maputo Declaration on the Use of Children as Soldiers (1999)
- Red Cross Guidelines for Children in Armed Conflicts (1996)
- Cape Town Plan of Action (1997)
- African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1991)
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)
- Geneva Conventions (1949),
- According to *ACRWC* and *Geneva Conventions* it is an offence to demand that a child under 15 yrs participate in armed conflict, even if the child reports as a volunteer.

Countries Routinely Using Combatants Under 15 Years of Age

Afghanistan Albania Algeria Angola Burma (Myanmar) Burundi Cambodia Columbia Congo-Brazzaville Congo-Kinshasa (Zaire) Ethiopia Indonesia / East Timor India (Kashmir) Iraq / Kurdistan Iran Israel/Occupied Territories Lebanon Liberia Mexico Russia /Chechnya Peru Philippines Sierra Leone Somalia Sri Lanka Sudan Turkey / Kurdistan

(Save the Children (2001)

Scope of the Problem

- 300,000 children worldwide (BBC News, 2000)
- 36 nations routinely use children under 18 as combatants
- 27 nations routinely use children under 15 as combatants
- 190,000 in Africa alone (Amnesty International, 1999)
- Sierra Leone: 80% of all rebel soldiers were age 7 to 14
- Part of a broad range of child-related problems

Scope of the Problem

- Sri Lanka- “Of 180 Tamil Tigers killed in one government attack, more than half were in their teens, and 128 were girls.”

The Impact of Armed Conflict On Children. 1996

Graca Machel,
Expert of the Secretary General of the United Nations

Contributing Problems: Small Arms

- "In many post conflict societies, up to 70% of all civilian still possess military-type firearms, mainly assault rifles such as the M-16 and AK 47."

- "These weapons are responsible for more than 60% of all weapons-related deaths and injuries in internal conflicts- far more than land mines, mortars,grenades, artillery and major weapons systems combined."

(Boutwell & Klare, *Scientific American*, June, 2000)

Contributing Problems: Small Arms

- Small arms were the only weapon used in 46 of the 49 regional conflicts that have occurred since 1990.
  - AK-47 Cost: $6 US; For chicken, maybe…for a goat, definitely!
  - Easy to manufacture, transport, conceal, fire, maintain
  - Very durable, reliable, plentiful, and light
  - Ideal weapon for untrained combatants, especially children.
- Number available? Probably about 500 million.

(Boutwell & Klare, *Scientific American*, June, 2000)

Contributing Problems: Small Arms

- Five most most common light assault weapons:
  - M-16:- 6.4 lbs.- fires 700-950 rounds per minute- used in 67 countries
  - FAL Rifle:- 9.5 lbs.- fires 600-700 rounds per minute- used in 94 countries
  - G-3 Rifle:- 9.7 lbs.- fires 500-600 rounds per minute- used in 67conutries
  - AK-47:- 9.5 lbs.- fires 600 rounds per minute- used in 78 countries
  - Uzi:- 7.7 lbs.- fires 600 rounds per minute- used in 40 countries

How Are Children Recruited ?

- Distinction between “voluntary” & forced is meaningless Often abducted from schools, homes & refugee camps
- Unaccompanied minors at enhanced risk
- Frequently drugged; often killed if they try to escape
- Some join just to survive
- Most child combatants under 18 are recruited into government armed forces
- Most child combatants under 15 are found in non-government paramilitary organizations

Typical Activities of Child Soldiers

- Supply a work force; provide adults with household and sexual services (soldiers “wives”)
- Spying missions, messengers, enforcers, guard duties
- Participate in combat
- “Up to 30% of some guerrilla units in Columbia

Developmental Impairment

- Adolescence is a time of rapid change and a critical window of opportunity for the establishment of an appropriate identity and social role.

- Self image (identity) results from the complex interaction of a constellation of social variables including role modeling, peer pressure, and physical environment.

Developmental Issues

- Children are NOT little adults
- Armed conflict negatively affects all aspects of child development- physical, mental, emotional and spiritual.
- The younger the child, the greater the importance of environment
- Development proceeds through stages
  - Each stage builds upon those that come before
  - Problems at one stage can recur in stages that follow

Contextual Issues: Children in Armed Conflict

UNICEF Survey - Children in Armed Conflict

Non-Combatant Children in Zones of Conflict:

- Children in Sarajevo:
  - 55% had been shot at
  - 66% in situations where they expected to die
- Children in Angola:
  - 66% had seen people murdered
  - 67% had seen people tortured, beaten or hurt
- Children in Rwanda:
  - 56% had seen children kill people
  - 80% had lost immediate family members
  - 16% were forced to hide under dead bodies

Vulnerability & Resilience

- Childhood is a time of rapid change
- High:
  - Sensitivity to damage
  - Adaptability to adverse circumstances
- Vulnerability and resilience occur physically and psychologically

Resilience

- Flexibility; the ability to bounce back
- The rapid change that occurs in childhood, which brings great vulnerability, also seems to allow for great resilience
- Inherently variable within individuals
- Promoted by connections with family, culture, traditions, including traditional legal framework

Aggression in Children

- Aggressive impulses in children are normal
- The same impulses give rise to worry in normal children
- Children depend on adults & society to help gradually modify aggressive impulses

Historical Note: The Children's Crusade

- Developed in 1212, simultaneously in France and Germany
- Leaders were two children, claiming divine guidance
- Thousands of children marched to war despite wishes of parents and relatives
- Very few returned

Developmental Problems

- Major behavioral, psychological, and moral problems:
  - Socialization to violence
  - De-humanization: loss of empathy & sympathy
  - De-individuation: loss of identity & accountability
  - Inability to form trust-based relationships
  - Lack of education and constructive alternatives
- Result: entire societies are crippled emotionally, socially & economically for generations

What About Accountability ?

- What is the threshold of accountability
  - Participation? Leadership? Age ?
- What is the proper venue
  - Formal legal system ? Traditional accountability? Both ?
- Who should determine these answers
  - UN ? Subject Nation ? Indigenous / Traditional Authorities
- Context involves fundamental issues in sovereignty

Best Practices for Recovery

- “Experience has shown that with supportive care-givers and secure communities, most children will achieve a sense of healing and some will prove remarkably resilient.”

Impact of Armed Conflict On Children. Report of the expert of the secretary general. Ms Grac’a Machel. Submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 48 / 157

Best Practices for Recovery

"The ways in which people express, embody and give meaning to their distress are largely dependent on social, cultural, political and economic contexts…In many areas of Africa, the main sources of trauma are considered to be spiritual…Western diagnostic approaches can be ill-suited to a context in which people are more likely to turn for assistance to family, friends and traditional healers than to seek medical help for their problems."

Impact of Armed Conflict On Children. Report of the expert of the secretary general. Ms Grac'a Machel. Submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 48 / 157

Best Practices for Recovery

- Must be recognized as *victims* of conflict
  - Major component is forgiveness: education in Mozambique
- Culturally relevant concepts and traditions is essential
  - Indigenous cleansing rituals
- Therapeutic strategies focus on normalization
  - Integrate school, education, community: chores, play, faith
  - Cultivate a sense of purpose, self esteem & appropriate identity
  - Traditional domestic responsibilities: laundry, gardening, etc
  - Foster placement if appropriate

Best Practices for Recovery

- Integrate psychological & social & educational needs using culturally appropriate concepts & traditions
- Re-establish familiar routines of home & community life,
  - School, to cultivate a sense of purpose, self esteem, and appropriate identity (big security issue)
  - Traditional domestic responsibilities, laundry, gardening, etc

Best Practices for Recovery

- Local people must be involved in the design, implementation and monitoring of programs.
- Child soldiers may have problems returning to their area of origin due to participation in terrorist or other activities
- If appropriate, recovery plans may involve placement in a foster family placement or relocation

Implications at the State Level

- Failure of the state to respond institutionalizes the cycle of retributive justice among the afflicted.
- Re-integration of children into normal educational and vocational pursuits provides an alternative to continued soldiering and permits the development of sustainable institutions both social & economic.
- Rejection of child soldiering is a marker for the moral integrity of national governments.